

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today voted for and helped the House pass a bill that will help ensure Americans get a real choice and a fair deal when purchasing health insurance. The Health Insurance Industry Fair Competition Act will take away the anti-trust exemption for health insurance companies, requiring them to compete fairly and adhere to the same anti-trust laws as other companies.

"For far too long, health insurance companies have been permitted to operate under a different set of rules that have enabled them to exploit the American people and unfairly driven up costs to those with insurance while putting the ability to obtain health insurance further out of reach for many other Americans," Hinchey said. "The bill we passed today helps level the playing field so that the American people don't have to feel like they are playing a rigged carnival game in which they almost always come out on the losing end while the insurance industry walks away with enormous profits. At the same time, those of us in Congress are continuing to press full steam ahead with comprehensive health care reform, which will go a long way toward insuring every American has access to quality, affordable health care without any unfair strings attached."

For 65 years, the health insurance industry has been legally exempt from anti-trust laws, and the federal government was banned from even investigating evidence of possible collusion. In the last 14 years alone, there have been 400 mergers among health insurers. Ninety-four percent of all insurance markets are now "highly concentrated" – meaning consumers have little or no choice between insurance providers.

Under the legislation Hinchey helped pass today, health insurers that were previously exempt from anti-trust laws would bear legal responsibility for price fixing, dividing up territories among themselves and sabotaging their competitors in order to gain a monopoly in the marketplace. Such practices have been outlawed in other industries for decades. The Senate still needs to vote on a similar bill.

The legislation is supported by numerous groups including the American Hospital Association, American Nurses Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, Consumers Union, Consumer Federation of America, Center for Justice and Democracy, and U.S. PIRG.

